



Wal Hannington, 1896-1966

Vanguard

In politics, the word “vanguard” means the professional force, human framework or “cadre” which can lead the mass movement of the people on a revolutionary path.

The relationship of the revolutionary vanguard to the mass organisations of the people is in some respects similar to the relationship of a doctor to the people, or of accountants and lawyers to businesses, or of an architect or an engineer to builders and their clients.

The vanguard is made up of professional revolutionaries.

The revolutionary vanguard is a servant, and not a master. The vanguard party of the working class serves the working class. It does not boss the working class. Nor does it substitute itself for the working class.

The working-class vanguard party, which is the communist party, is not separate from the mass movement. It is intimately involved with the mass movement at all times and at all levels. The vanguard party educates, organises and mobilises. As a vanguard, it must have expert knowledge about how mass movements in general, and especially about how the primary mass organisations of the working class which are the trade unions, work.

To deal with this crucial matter (i.e. how trade unions work) here, in the attached document (and download linked below), is a text from the Marxists Internet Archive's Encyclopaedia of Marxism, written by Brian Basgen and Andy Blunden, two comrades who clearly have vast experience of what they are writing about.

This text is empirical and experiential and there is nothing wrong with that, because experiential is exactly what trade unions and other mass organisations are. Trade unions arise out of the existing consciousness of workers as it is found under capitalism. In many ways, workers emulate capitalist forms of organisation. Their initial purpose is to get a better money deal in exchange for their labour-power in the capitalist labour-market.

Trade unions are therefore in the first place reformist, and not revolutionary. Nor can trade unions become revolutionary without the assistance of professional revolutionaries, organised separately as a communist party. Lenin dealt with this relationship in "What is to be Done?", which we will look at tomorrow.

Trade unionists who think that they can dispense with the assistance of a communist party – the ones known as “economists”, “workerists” or “syndicalists” – are on a road to ruin.

Rules of Debate

Crucial to the democracy of mass organisations are the Rules of Debate and Procedure of Meetings. These are a bit like language, or [political education](#), or the Internet, in the sense of being communistic, and not given as authority. They are not imposed by a “state”. There is no institutional enforcer of these rules. They exist in society, but without a “state” to enforce them.

For example, the South African Communist Party has no given Rules of Debate, or Standing Orders. Unfortunately, this does not prevent people from claiming “Points of Order”!

The nature of the notional “rules” is such that they are only effective to the extent that they are understood in common by the members of any particular gathering, and enforced by these members.

Wal Hannington [1896-1966, pictured] was well known as a communist leader of the unemployed workers’ movement in Britain in the 1930s. Our summary of his 1950 booklet “Mr Chairman” is included with this item on Trade Unions because communists involved in trade unions need this knowledge of

rules of debate and procedure of meetings, as well.

Hannington wrote: "The Chairman is there to guide the meeting, not to boss it." This is the most valuable message in his book. The Rules of Debate and the Procedures of Meetings are only justified to the extent that they liberate the people present. They become useless when they are felt as a burden or as an obstruction.

The point is not for the Chairperson to “keep order”, or for individuals to be bullied down with “points of order”. The Chairperson serves the meeting, and the meeting needs to know how to guide the Chairperson. Everything works best when everybody is familiar with the generic Rules of Debate.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Worker Solidarity and Unions, MIA, Meetings, Hannington](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).